



PDF 1

PDF 2

PDF 3

PDF 4

PDF 5

» HOW TO... Do Policy Analysis

There are nine key things you need to know to help you analyse policy and its impact on the people and communities you represent. Use these nine steps if you want to make a policy submission, when a consultation document arrives on your desk, if you are invited to attend a consultation meeting or if you are asked to sit on a taskforce or working group.

» **Nine key steps**

First, read the policy document very carefully and note down anything that occurs to you as you go. Then read it again, taking the following into account:

1) Know your subject

You must be 100 per cent confident in what you are saying about the issue or the community you are representing. This is important for your credibility. While you can't represent every single viewpoint, you should be up to date with the trends, developments and opinions in the area that you are claiming to know about. You need to know the key problems and issues, as well as what needs to happen to make a positive difference. You may need to consult other people or organisations at this stage to hear their views and experiences on the issue.

2) Know what you have said before

Check if your organisation has commented on this issue before. It's important that you give a consistent message and don't contradict yourself. However, things change. If something has happened that has made you shift your position be sure that you clearly say why.

3) Know the status quo

Be aware of the current policies that relate to this area. You should be able to compare the proposed policy with what already exists and see if it will make any difference to the changes you have identified as needed. Talk to people affected and check relevant websites for existing policy documents.

4) Know what good policy looks like

While all policies are different, there are certain key principles that help in developing effective policies. (see page 6: Key Characteristics of Effective Policies)

5) Know the process

It's important to be aware of how the policy was developed. Try to find out if the policy-makers sought the views of the people the policy will affect and if other sources of experience and knowledge were used.

6) Know what others are saying

Be aware of other organisations in your field and what they are saying about the policy. It is important for the community and voluntary sector to work together on issues when it can, and to say roughly the same things. However, it is also important to know when others might not agree with you and to prepare a counter argument. There also might be organisations from other sectors that you will agree or disagree with.

7) Know the statistics

Statistics can add much weight to an argument. However, they can also be misrepresented, misinterpreted or simply wrong. Never use statistics that you don't understand. Make sure the statistics you use are from reliable sources. If in doubt leave them out. Remember, also, to check out any of the figures that are quoted in policy documents for their reliability and the extent to which they reflect the reality of your experience.

8) Know the bigger picture

No policy exists in isolation. Find out the overall strategies into which this policy will fit and any existing targets or priorities. You will need to know if this policy will make a positive contribution to the overall plan or if it contradicts it. Often, key concepts that government has adopted will be evident in all its policies. You should assess if they are present in this document.

9) Know how you would do it better

The best policy positions are those that can analyse the issue and offer realistic solutions. It's not enough just to complain about a policy. But also know what's possible – drawing up unrealistic wish lists won't help your credibility or help the people you represent. A key part of this is to identify good practice, here or internationally, that can be used to illustrate your points.

Use the policy analysis template on page 8 to help you work your way through the Key Factors of Effective Policy. (see below)

» Key Characteristics of Effective Policies

Has the policy clearly identified the problem?

Good policy will clearly identify the issue it is hoping to affect. Often, policies are designed to tackle the wrong thing. In England, for example, there were proposals to ban hooded tops in shopping centres to control anti-social behaviour by young people. The real problem wasn't the hoodies. It was bad behaviour by young people.

Is the policy based on evidence and reality?

Policy solutions to a problem should be based on evidence of what the problem really is. This involves analysis of current statistics, examples of practice from elsewhere, knowledge of trends, and the opinions and experience of the people or areas that the policy will affect.

Does it have a vision?

The policy should clearly set out what it hopes to achieve. Action points should flow from this vision. All too often, policies are made the wrong way round. Government examines what it can do and then describes what that will achieve. This approach results in badly thought out action points that won't make a real change. Good policy should be driven by a vision of what needs to happen; then the action points should show how they contribute to this vision.

Does it have a budget?

Policies with budgets are much more attractive to government departments than policies without. Most actions require resources but this doesn't always mean extra money. Perhaps something that already exists can be done more effectively or something that isn't working can be stopped and the resources put elsewhere.

Is it measurable?

This is crucial. How will we know it's working? Policies must have actions. Actions must be matched by targets or they are simply statements of opinion. It's also important to have the right types of target. Effective targets will be very clear on what they will do and by when.

- **Reduce child poverty? Not a target.**
- **Eliminate child poverty by 2010? Target!**

Will it be monitored?

Effective policies will outline appropriate and inclusive structures for monitoring and evaluation. We need to know if the policy is working and how it will respond to changes. Policy should be constantly evolving by being evaluated and changed as it is implemented. Otherwise it becomes a document on a shelf.

» Policy Analysis Template

Policy Title:

Department or organisation responsible:

Main contact:

Deadline for responses:

Key Questions	Answers	Notes and Actions
<p>1. Know your subject.</p> <p>a) What are the key facts about this issue relating to the people or areas you represent?</p> <p>(b) What are the key trends that affect them?</p>		
<p>2. Know what you have said before.</p> <p>List the key points you have previously made on this topic and the dates you made them.</p>		

Key Questions	Answers	Notes and Actions
<p>Are they still correct?</p> <p>If not what has changed to make you change your mind?</p>		
<p>3. Know the status quo.</p> <p>a) List the policies that already exist in this area.</p> <p>(b) What are the key problems with them?</p> <p>(c) What is working well?</p> <p>(d) How is this one different?</p>		
<p>4. Know what good policy looks like.</p> <p>(a) Has the policy clearly identified the problem it hopes to solve?</p> <p>b) Is it the right problem?</p> <p>(c) Does it have a clear vision of what it wants to achieve?</p>		

Key Questions	Answers	Notes and Actions
(d) Does it have a budget? (e) Does it have clear measurable targets? (f) How will it be monitored?		
5. Know the process. (a) Who was involved in developing the policy? (b) Is it based on evidence and does the evidence reflect the reality as you know it? (c) Did it take into account the views of the people it will affect?		
6. Know what others are saying. (a) List all of the organisations that also will have an interest in this topic.		

Key Questions	Answers	Notes and Actions
<p>(b) What are the key points they are making? What do we agree with? What do we disagree with?</p> <p>(c) Can we work closely with one or more organisations on this?</p>		
<p>7. Know the statistics.</p> <p>(a) What are the key statistics used in the report?</p> <p>(b) Do we agree with them?</p> <p>(c) Are there other statistics that we can use to back up our argument?</p> <p>(d) Is there relevant research that has not been used?</p>		

Key Questions	Answers	Notes and Actions
<p>8. Know the bigger picture.</p> <p>(a) List the key government strategies and priorities that are relevant to this policy.</p> <p>(b) Does this policy contribute to them?</p> <p>(c) Does this policy contradict or ignore them?</p>		
<p>9. Know how you would do it better.</p> <p>(a) List the actions that need to be taken for the policy to have a positive impact.</p> <p>(b) How do your recommendations fit in with the strategies and priorities listed in question 8?</p>		

Key Questions	Answers	Notes and Actions
(c) Are there any examples of best practice that can be used to illustrate the effectiveness of your recommendations?		
10. Know how much it will cost to implement your recommendations		